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# COMMUNIST CAPABILITIES IN SOUTH KOREA

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## COMMUNIST CAPABILITIES IN SOUTH KOREA

## SUMMARY

Communist capabilities in South Korea are now at a low level and probably will be further reduced if the Republic continues its present trend toward increased stability.

The network of Communist organizations in South Korea is designed to provide control mechanisms for every segment of society and is sufficiently broad to draw new members from all classes should a severe economic crisis cause popular discontent and a swing to the left. The number of South Koreans who have consistently braved various degrees of police action to assist the Communist program may exceed 600,000, while the total number of Koreans enrolled in Communist front organizations may exceed 10 percent of the 20 million population. Underground combat organizations under Communist control and leadership are scattered throughout the mountain areas of South Korea and present a continuing threat to internal security.

The Communists in South Korea are under the direct control of Soviet agents in North Korea. Their adherence to the Moscow line has incurred the hostility and distrust of Korean nationalists, and periodic mass arrests of Communist leaders have forced them to concentrate organizational efforts on rebuilding party channels and strengthening the underground forces. The anti-Communist program undertaken by the Republic of Korea, since its inauguration in August 1948, has forced many Communist leaders to flee to the North.

The Communists have failed to control labor and have lost the ability they possessed in September 1946 to call a general strike. They have, however, improved their technique of coordinated sabotage as demonstrated in the anti-election campaign of February 1948. They have devoted considerable effort, with some success, to infiltrating youth groups, political parties, the security forces, and the government on all levels.

Current Communist propaganda is aimed at creating confusion, fear, and defeatism in the South. The constant threat of invasion from the North and the susceptibility of the isolated villagers to propaganda can be exploited by the Communists to produce these results in local areas. But the Communists have lost the advantage they possessed in the fall of 1948 when it appeared to the Koreans that the US was about to withdraw all troops, leaving the infant Republic to face alone the combined forces of Communism in the Far East. Favorable UN action on Korea, the expectancy of continued US aid under ECA, and the moderate success of security forces in suppressing the guerrillas have restored confidence in their future among the people and officials of South Korea.

The mission of the Communist forces in South Korea is to assist in carrying out the Soviet plan for the eventual absorption of South Korea into the Korean Democratic Peoples Republic by undermining popular government support through the creation

Note: The intelligence organizations of the Departments of State, Army, Navy, and the Air Force have concurred in this report. The information herein is as of 10 February 1949.

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of political and economic chaos, dissipating the military strength of the Republic, and developing the conviction that Communist domination is inevitable, thereby achieving a favorable psychological climate for opportunist "coalition" with the north.

The present Communist strength in South Korea does not appear great enough to support a sustained, country-wide campaign that would accomplish this mission. The limitation of their future potential, however, depends primarily on the ability of government officials and the people to resolve their personal or party differences in presenting a united front to the Communists, and on the ability of the government to insure a minimum standard of living for both the farmer and the urban worker.

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## COMMUNIST CAPABILITIES IN SOUTH KOREA

### 1. SIZE AND ORGANIZATION OF THE SOUTH KOREAN COMMUNIST PARTY.

#### a. *Size.*

There may be fewer than 10,000 Communist Party card holders in South Korea among an estimated population of 20,000,000; but this figure has little significance as an indication of Communist strength. The number of South Koreans who have consistently braved various degrees of police action to assist the Communist program may exceed 600,000. Through the usual technique of interlocking directorates, the relatively small group of loyal and experienced Communists control political, social, and cultural organizations whose total membership may exceed 10 percent of the population. In addition to the members of the Communist Front organizations who have generally followed the party line, many more Koreans may be susceptible to Communist propaganda and leadership on specific or local issues.

Communist prestige, based on their leadership of Nationalist resistance to the Japanese, was highest at the time of liberation. In the absence of other political leadership, the Communists were able to assume leadership of the grass-roots independence movement which found expression in the establishment of the People's Committees throughout Korea in August 1945. In the following months, however, the Communists, by espousing USSR rather than Nationalist objectives, dissipated a substantial portion of their prestige and incurred the enmity of significant groups of the population.

Although membership in the Communist Party or its front organization was technically legal during the period of American Military Government, the police generally regarded the Communists as rebels and traitors who should be seized, imprisoned, and sometimes shot on the slightest provocation. All Communist activity was officially outlawed with the passage of the Law on the Nation's Public Peace in November 1948. Communists have become a militant underground force, not a part of normal community life throughout most of South Korea today.

#### b. *Organization.*

The Communist organization in South Korea is designed to provide control mechanisms for every segment of society. It is, in fact, a state within a state under the absolute control of USSR-approved leaders. The Communist "front" organizations include political parties, labor unions, cultural and intellectual societies, farmers associations, and youth groups. In addition, the Communists have developed underground militant organizations to serve as their revolutionary striking force. The network of front organizations is sufficiently broad to allow the entrance of new members from all classes of society should a severe economic crisis or repressive government security measures cause popular discontent and a swing to the left.

(1) *External Relations.*

Party policies for the Communist organization in South Korea are formulated in the North by Soviet personnel and transmitted by messengers, either to the Central Committee in Seoul via the Haeju office, or, in some cases, directly to local Communist guerrilla units by radio or by messengers traveling south by land or sea. At the present time, Kim Tan Ya, one of the founders of the Korean Communist Party in 1925, is reported to be the official Korean representative in Moscow. In addition to relations with Moscow through Soviet representatives in North Korea, the South Korean Communists are known to have contacts with the Japan Communist Party through the Communist elements of the *League of Koreans Residing in Japan* and with the Chinese Communist Party, whose agents have appeared in South Korea on both commercial and intelligence missions.

(2) *Communist Front Organizations.*

The Democratic Peoples Front is the all-inclusive Communist front in southern Korea. It was formed in February 1946 under the leadership of the Communist Party to unite all "democratic-social" groups. The Front served as a central control agency through which leaders of the Communist Party, and later the South Korean Labor Party, could issue instructions and control the many social and political member organizations.

(a) *South Korea Labor Party.*

The South Korea Labor Party (SKLP) contains the core of Communist organization and discipline in the South. It was formed in September 1946 when Pak Hun Yong, acting on orders from North Korea, technically disbanded the South Korean Communist Party and formed the SKLP in its place. The party headquarters is divided between Seoul and the town of Haeju, located just across the border in North Korea. The group in Haeju transmits instructions to Seoul for dissemination throughout the party network in the South and receives reports from the South for transmittal to the North Korean Communist Party and Soviet agents. The party network in the South extends from the Central Committee in Seoul, through the Provincial Committees, the city, county or district committees, and down to the cells. Cells exist in all factories, mines, villages, shops, schools, military units, and urban residential blocks where there are three or more Communists and permission for the formation of a cell has been obtained from the local committee.

(b) *Youth Groups.*

The militant Korean Democratic Patriotic Youth Alliance is the principal organization for Communist youth. It began as the Communist Youth Alliance, changed its name to the Democratic Youth Alliance, was outlawed by American Military Government for terroristic activities in April 1947, but continues to serve underground as a strong-arm force for the SKLP in all forms of terrorism and propaganda activity.

(c) *Labor Front.*

The Communist effort to organize South Korea's few industrial workers has been channeled through the *Council of All Korean Labor Unions* (Chung Pyung).

The Chung Pyung was discredited by its final failure and violence in the initially successful general strikes of October 1946. Since that date, it has failed several times, notably in February 1948, to instigate general strikes. The rightist *Dai Han Labor League* now controls labor in all significant industries and Communist efforts to infiltrate this union have met with limited success.

(d) *Farmers' Front.*

The large and underprivileged farm population has been the principal target of Communist propaganda and organizational activity since the Liberation. Communist potential to promote disorder and unrest among farmers remains high, but despite great efforts of the party-line All Korean Farmers Alliance and other Communist agencies, the farmers have been slow to join Communist groups. Physically isolated rural settlements are typical of South Korea. This isolation, as well as the pervading Confucian influence upon personal relations, promotes unity under the village head—a unity that extends to unified reaction—favorable or unfavorable—to new ideas. Thus it is possible to find villages completely dominated by Communist ideology in areas generally controlled by extreme rightists. This phenomenon is explained by the susceptibility of the peasants to Communist propaganda on the farm tenancy problem, the hostility to the rice collection program, and unified reaction to new ideas, and is widespread in Cholla Namdo, Cholla Pukto, Kyongsang Namdo, and Kyongsang Pukto, the principal areas of Communist strength.

(e) *Cultural Front.*

Leftist influence has also been extended to many of the intelligentsia through the *Central League of All Korean Cultural Groups*. Although government police action has restricted the expansion of the "cultural" fronts in South Korea, they continue to exercise considerable influence upon students, journalists, writers and scientists.

The party line has not been a major feature in many of the cultural associations, but they are important propaganda vehicles and serve as a cover for illegal Communist activity.

(3) *Militant Groups.*

Underground militant organizations under Communist control and leadership, the most important tools for the USSR's long-range program, are combat groups known collectively as the People's Liberation Army or the Action Vanguard Corps, consisting of separate guerrilla units. A Military Bureau, parallel with the Provincial Central Committee of the SKLP, is responsible for the organization and activities of the various forces within each province. In some provinces, at least, each town and village is in turn directly subordinate to the Provincial Bureau, and all directives emanating from the Bureau are rapidly disseminated to the local units. The existence of a centralized coordinating authority higher than the Provincial Bureaus has not been confirmed, nor is it known to what extent the SKLP issues specific directives to the guerrillas. However, as in South Korean Communist activities in general, it is known that important orders originate in Pyongyang and are transmitted to South Korea through agents who cross the 38th parallel daily. Trained organizers

are dispatched from the North to assist in planning activities and in teaching guerrilla tactics.

Guerrilla strength fluctuates widely, depending on activities. South Korean groups are being steadily reinforced by special units infiltrating from the North. Casualties during periodic police actions serve to reduce their numbers, and, during periods of inactivity, many non-party guerrillas return to their homes and resume an outward appearance of normal life. During active periods, the guerrillas are likely to gain spot recruits among non-Communists who may be aroused by police brutality or unpopular government measures such as forced rice collections.

The island of Cheju-Do has long been a center of guerrilla strength and activity. Police brutality, the venality of public officials, and the historic clannishness of the islanders contribute to the discontent which trained Communists have fanned into chronic revolt. Recently, indiscriminate guerrilla activity against villages has caused many formerly sympathetic civilians to assist security forces in combing the hills, and the first mass surrenders of guerrillas on Cheju-Do have since been reported.

The South Korean guerrillas are estimated to have about half their forces armed only with bamboo spears and the rest with Japanese rifles or carbines and M-1's captured from security forces or contributed by mutineers. A few trucks, machine guns, and mortars fell into guerrilla hands during the recent Constabulary revolts. There undoubtedly will be an attempt to increase the small-scale flow of arms from North Korea. Other supplies are obtained through forced donations of money, rice, clothing, and miscellaneous equipment. Most of the barren mountain areas where the guerrillas seek refuge are far distant from a sympathetic population. As a result, the guerrillas must resort to raiding hostile lowland areas for food and are then exposed to police action.

Guerrilla training schools are located in South Korean mountain hide-outs and in the North. Courses extend from two weeks to six months and include tactics, discipline, sabotage and espionage training, as well as indoctrination in the basic elements of Communism and techniques of propaganda. Discipline in the schools is strict, and continuous adherence to prescribed rules is enforced. The action of December 1948, against guerrillas in Kwangwon-do, however, indicated that their morale and training were far below the level expected from Soviet-schooled personnel. Many guerrillas gave in without offering resistance, and their indoctrination in Communism appeared to be superficial.

## 2. ESTIMATE OF ANTI-COMMUNIST STRENGTH.

The old Korean traditions, based on historical continuity, racial and cultural homogeneity, and an intense pride in their past, survived forty years of Japanization and continues to resist both Soviet-sponsored Communism and Western style democracy. In addition, a stronger spirit of nationalism developed as a reaction to Japanese occupation and was further intensified by the liberation. The overwhelming majority of the people in South Korea are anti-Communist. This feeling, however, is more a revulsion against Communist terrorism and individual Communists, who are patently the agents of a foreign power, than a politically sophisticated rejection of



Communist ideology. The long-suffering South Korean farmers, who comprise 80 percent of the population, will support the government or party that appears most capable of providing them with land ownership, fertilizer, low taxes, consumer goods, and a minimum of police brutality.

The small industrial labor class has demonstrated an inability to perform its theoretical function as the revolutionary vanguard and has generally accepted the leadership of nationalists whose views represent a unique Far Eastern blend of socialism and capitalism. Anti-Communist feeling is especially strong among those with a vested interest in the Republic of Korea. The police, who have been the frequent targets of Communist violence, are generally willing to take action against known or suspected Communists without recourse to judicial processes. The government is bitterly anti-Communist and is taking severe measures to curtail all Communist activity.

In the final analysis, anti-Communist strength depends on the ability of the government to develop political unity, a viable economy, a loyal and efficient security force, and to gain international support. (See ORE 44-48, Prospects for Survival of the Republic of Korea.) The Republic has been accorded diplomatic recognition by several powers including the United States and is supported by the UN. The current three-year program of US economic and military assistance will contribute to sustaining the economy, developing efficient security forces, and give impetus to the trend toward increased governmental stability and greater anti-Communist strength.

### 3. COMMUNIST ACTIVITIES.

#### a. *Organizing Activity.*

There were two factions in the Korean Communist Party when the Liberation in 1945 permitted the first open Communist activity in the country. The Nationalist faction (led by Lee Yung) submitted to a merger with the pro-Soviet faction (led by Pak Hun Yung) in September 1945. Although Pak's leadership along a strict Stalinist line has since dominated the party, the inherent strength of Korean nationalism has, at times, weakened party discipline and has resulted in the withdrawal of several prominent party members.

In 1945, party leaders in South Korea felt that the proletariat was politically too immature for successful revolution and, lacking the actual presence of USSR forces, the Communists advocated a united front of all liberal and leftist elements as the best way to achieve their objectives.

Early in 1946, Soviet policies forced the South Korean Communists to follow a pro-trusteeship line that incurred the hostility and distrust of Korean nationalists. The united front movement collapsed, but vigorous organizational activity continued in the attempt to enroll farmers, laborers, youth, and the intelligentsia in groups where they could be indoctrinated in the party line and used to further Communist objectives. Periodic mass arrests of Communist leaders, particularly since August 1947, have forced them to concentrate on rebuilding party channels and strengthening

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the underground forces. The anti-Communist program undertaken by the Government of the Republic of Korea, since its inauguration in August 1948, has undoubtedly further restricted all types of organizational activity. Several thousand SKLP members or suspected Communists have been arrested. Many others have chosen escape to the North rather than the party praise and prestige that would follow imprisonment for revolutionary activity in the South.

b. *Strikes and Sabotage.*

Labor strikes and industrial sabotage are a major activity of the South Korean Communists. While improving their technique of sabotage, they have lost the ability to call general strikes owing to the success of the rightist *Dai Han Labor League* in gaining control of labor in all significant industries. In September 1946, the Communists, with the assistance of leaders from the North, were able to paralyze South Korea by striking the railroads, shipyards, public utilities, and postal systems, but an attempt to repeat this success in February 1948 resulted only in minor and short-lived work stoppages. On the other hand, the inefficient mass disorder technique used in the 1946 general strike has been refined to the technique of well planned and coordinated sabotage demonstrated in the anti-election campaign of February 1948. In one night, the Communists damaged forty locomotives, ripped up tracks in three areas, and cut the police lines out of Seoul to every provincial division. Although counter-police action was effective and the Communist violence did not succeed in frustrating the UN-supervised general election in South Korea, it is significant that extraordinary police action was unable to prevent extensive damage to public and private property in the spring of 1948.

c. *Infiltration of Government, Security Forces, Political Parties.*

The South Korean Communists, aided by trained agents from the North, have devoted considerable effort to infiltrating rightist youth groups and political parties, the security forces, and the government on all levels. The most sensational evidence of their success was presented when forty members of a Communist cell in the 14th Constabulary Regiment instigated a revolt at Yosu in October 1948. Since the Yosu revolt, some progress has been made in screening the security forces and removing Communist and other dissident elements. Previous incidents had confirmed the widespread existence of Communist cells in municipal and provincial government bureaus, and in the secretarial section of the National Police. Special efforts have been made by the Democratic Youth Alliance to infiltrate the various rightist youth groups which form the most important pool of manpower for the security forces. The extent of Communist infiltration in rightist political parties is not known, but it undoubtedly is slight. Many of the small parties, on the other hand, normally defined as moderate or leftist, have been the successful targets of infiltration.

d. *Propaganda.*

Propaganda dissemination, to aid in the accomplishment of the ultimate aim of political control, is closely integrated with all Communist activity in the South. The Communists have been most efficiently trained and organized for propaganda

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work that includes not only the usual attacks on the United States and the "pro-Japanese Korean National Traitors," but "education" and indoctrination of the masses in the Communist way of thinking to obtain widespread adherence to the "party line." Communist propaganda, primarily directed at the masses, is not designed to promote rational thinking, but to stir up unreasoned violence and emotions against the United States and the Korean Government.

Current Communist propaganda is aimed at creating confusion, fear, and defeatism in the South. The Communist victory in China is cited to prove the inevitability of Communist domination throughout the Far East. Rumors of invasion from the North by an overwhelming force are used to incite fear; distrust of the government is created by allegations that President Rhee and other officials are permitting the US to exploit Korea as a colonial possession under the guise of the ECA program. The government and the people became increasingly susceptible to this propaganda in the fall of 1948; but a rebirth of confidence has resulted from UN recognition, the success of the Constabulary in quelling revolts, the extension of the ECA program to Korea, and the announcement of the withdrawal of Soviet troops. Korea will remain, however, a fertile field for Communist propaganda so long as economic conditions fail to improve materially, oppressive security measures are used by the government, and the spectre remains of vast Communist armies from Manchuria and North Korea conquering the South.

#### 4. COMMUNIST CAPABILITIES IN SOUTH KOREA.

The present Communist strength in South Korea does not appear great enough to support a sustained country-wide campaign that would seriously dissipate the economic or military resources of the government. The Communists can: (1) continue to receive reinforcements of trained guerrillas from North Korea; (2) assist an open invasion from North Korea by expending all their reserve strength in a coordinated, country-wide campaign of sabotage, revolts, assassinations, and propaganda; (3) effect limited economic sabotage; (4) continue to commit isolated and coordinated acts of violence and terrorism against police, government officials, property, and rural communities; (5) instigate minor revolts in the armed forces; and (6) create fear and confusion in local areas.

If the Communists in South Korea attempted an all-out campaign against the government unsupported by invasion from the north, the major result would be a further loss of Communist strength and prestige. Although the nature of the terrain prevents the effective sealing of the border against infiltrating guerrillas from the north, the gain in strength from this source probably will not be sufficient to balance losses attributable to continuing counteraction by government security forces. The recent revolts in the Constabulary have brought some infiltrated Communists into the open, facilitated the vigorous government program for screening the security forces, and reduced Communist capabilities of inciting further revolts and infiltrating the security forces. Successful field collaboration between the police and Constabulary against the guerrillas has dissipated some of the mutual distrust between these

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organizations. But remaining Communist cells in the Constabulary probably continue to have the capability of exploiting such bitter feelings as exist toward the police.

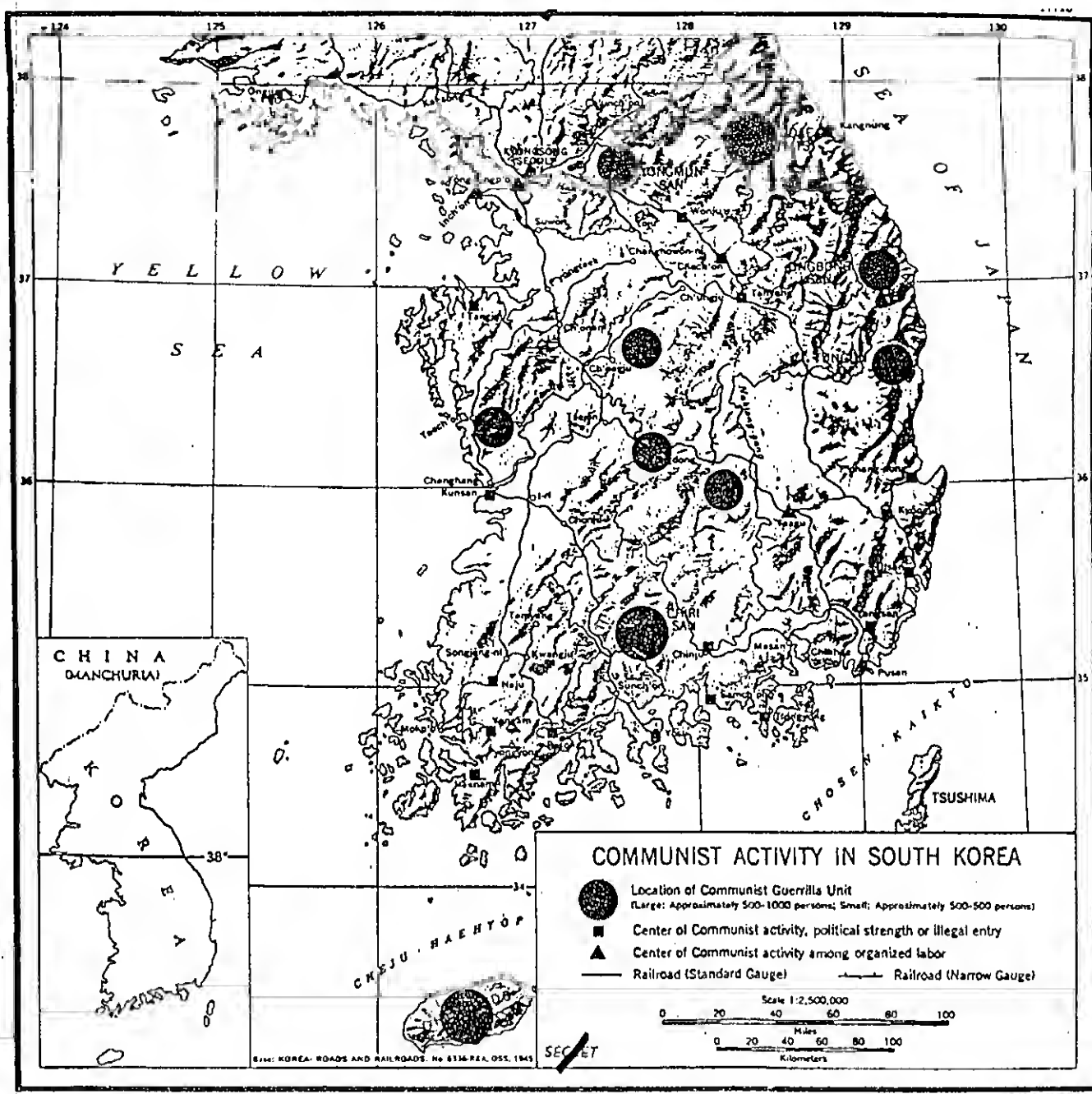
The constant threat of invasion from the north and the susceptibility of the isolated villagers to propaganda can be exploited by the Communists to create fear and confusion in local areas. But the Communists have lost the advantage they possessed in the fall of 1948 when it appeared to the Koreans that the US was about to withdraw all troops, leaving the infant Republic to face alone the combined forces of the North Koreans, the Chinese Communists, the Soviets, and the internal opposition. Favorable UN action \* on the Republic of Korea, expectancy of continued US aid under ECA, and the moderate success of security forces in suppressing the guerrillas, have restored confidence in their future among the people and officials of South Korea.

Communist capabilities in South Korea are now at a low level and probably will be further reduced if the economy and security forces continue to be strengthened. They still have a highly controlled and efficient party network capable of rapid expansion to take advantage of any unrest or disunity that may develop. The limitation of their future potential will depend primarily on the ability of the government officials and the people to resolve their personal or party differences in presenting a united front to the Communists, and on the ability of the government to insure a minimum standard of living for both the farmer and the urban worker.

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\* The UN General Assembly "declares that there has been established a lawful government (Government of the Republic of Korea) having effective control and jurisdiction over that part of Korea where the Temporary Commission was able to observe and consult and in which a great majority of the people of Korea reside; that this Government is based on elections which were a valid expression of the free will of the electorate of that part of Korea and which were observed by the Temporary Commission; and that this is the only such government in Korea."

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